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UNCLAS RANGOON 001649

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STATE FOR EAP/BCLTV, CA TASK FORCE, OPS CENTER
BANGKOK FOR USAID, FAS
USPACOM FOR FPA

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TAGS: AEMR CASC KFLO PREL PINR PGOV AMGT BM

SUBJECT: TFX001: (12/30) BURMA SITUATION SEEMS STABLE...FOR NOW

REF: RANGOON 1643 AND PREVIOUS

¶1. Summary: All USG personnel in Burma are accounted for and safe. There have still been no reports of Amcit casualties or verified cases of missing Americans. There was no new information on casualties in Burma on December 30th, though a UN team found little evidence to dispute GOB claims of December 29th of 51 dead, 45 injured, and 70 missing. The GOB is still not asking for assistance, but may be willing to accept it if the situation worsens. End summary.

USG Personnel Safe and Sound

¶2. All USG personnel at Embassy Rangoon, including local staff, are accounted for and safe. The Consular Section is currently working to resolve about 50 American Citizen welfare and whereabouts inquiries -- many of them quite general in nature. There have still been no reports of Amcit casualties or verified cases of missing Americans.

No New Information, But Situation Seems Stable

¶3. After only two days of minimal coverage, the GOB's mouthpiece newspaper, "The New Light of Myanmar," has stopped publishing stories about the impact of the earthquakes and tsunami in Burma. However, it has expanded its reprinting of

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wire stories detailing the death and destruction in the region. The December 30th edition did print a small notification of an earthquake of 3.0 on the Richter scale, centered on Rangoon in the early hours of December 29th (reftel). In the absence of any official update, the GOB tally remains 51 dead, 45 injured, 70 missing, and 788 homeless.

¶4. A UNDP team has returned from the Andaman Sea coastal Irrawaddy River delta, southwest of Rangoon, reporting that the region was hit by the tsunami, but found no evidence to contradict the GOB's public assessment of minimal damage and casualties limited to several dozen killed. Another UN source told us that his GOB contacts were maintaining their initial claim of little damage and few casualties from Tanintharyi Division in the far southeast of the country. A Rangoon businessman with tourist interests in that area repeated his earlier assessment that there was no serious damage to that area due to high waves. However, there was an unverified rumor that about 100 fishermen were still missing from that region. We reiterate that the touristed beach areas on the Bay of Bengal west and northwest of Rangoon received no damage and travel to those areas is as normal.

GOB Might Accept Aid, But Won't Ask

¶5. According to the senior UN representative in Rangoon, the GOB is not asking for any international assistance, but may be willing to accept it if proffered. He said UN agencies were proceeding under that assumption and would provide assistance as necessary when assessments were complete. No known international organizations have yet been able to see firsthand the conditions on remote islands of the Irrawaddy delta or along Burma's southeastern coast. These areas are not frequented by foreign tourists, however.

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